

# Freedom in a Locked Ward in Vilnius

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VILNIUS, Lithuania, March 25 — At midnight the scene at the city psychiatric hospital seemed a microcosm of the state of Lithuanian independence.

There was freedom, of a sort, for the young Lithuanians who had exercised the new patriotism and deserted from the Soviet Army for shelter at the hospital. They used their freedom listlessly, watchfully, waiting for their former Soviet masters to do something.

The Soviet masters simply kept them waiting in their independence.

## Letting Things Drift

They were not quite yet arresting the bewildered young men at the hospital, who are among nearly 3,000 estimated to have deserted from the ranks of about 38,000 Lithuanians serving in the Soviet armed forces. Moscow's soldiers were not approaching the locked ward door, where a Red Cross flag had been hastily set up even though the Red Cross was not a party to the scene. The masters were content to let things drift, as in the rest of Lithuania.

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The ward was shadowy and pathetically bare, mainly rows of metal cots, where a score of soldiers lay in civilian clothes, wondering what was happening and whether nationalist officials could deliver on their promise to protect them.

Representatives from the new Lithuanian government were nowhere in sight at the midnight deadline announced from Moscow for the soldiers to return to Soviet barracks. A Russian hospital attendant who came to work to find her normal psychiatric patients suddenly gone was in charge by default, wondering what to do.

## Sitting and Waiting

She felt sorry for the dilemma the young men had been put in by the headstrong new government, but said so only privately, knowing she was in the minority in the new Lithuania. The deserters and the nurse sat and waited behind the locked door.

Thus far, Soviet loyalists apparently have been content to skirt serious challenges to the new Government in favor of symbolic ones. Tonight, a group of loyalists showed up

with soldiers to "seize" the Communist Party Higher School, the local seat of Leninism, not known to be coveted by independent Lithuania.

They made a show of their control, with several rifle-bearing soldiers standing in the lobby.

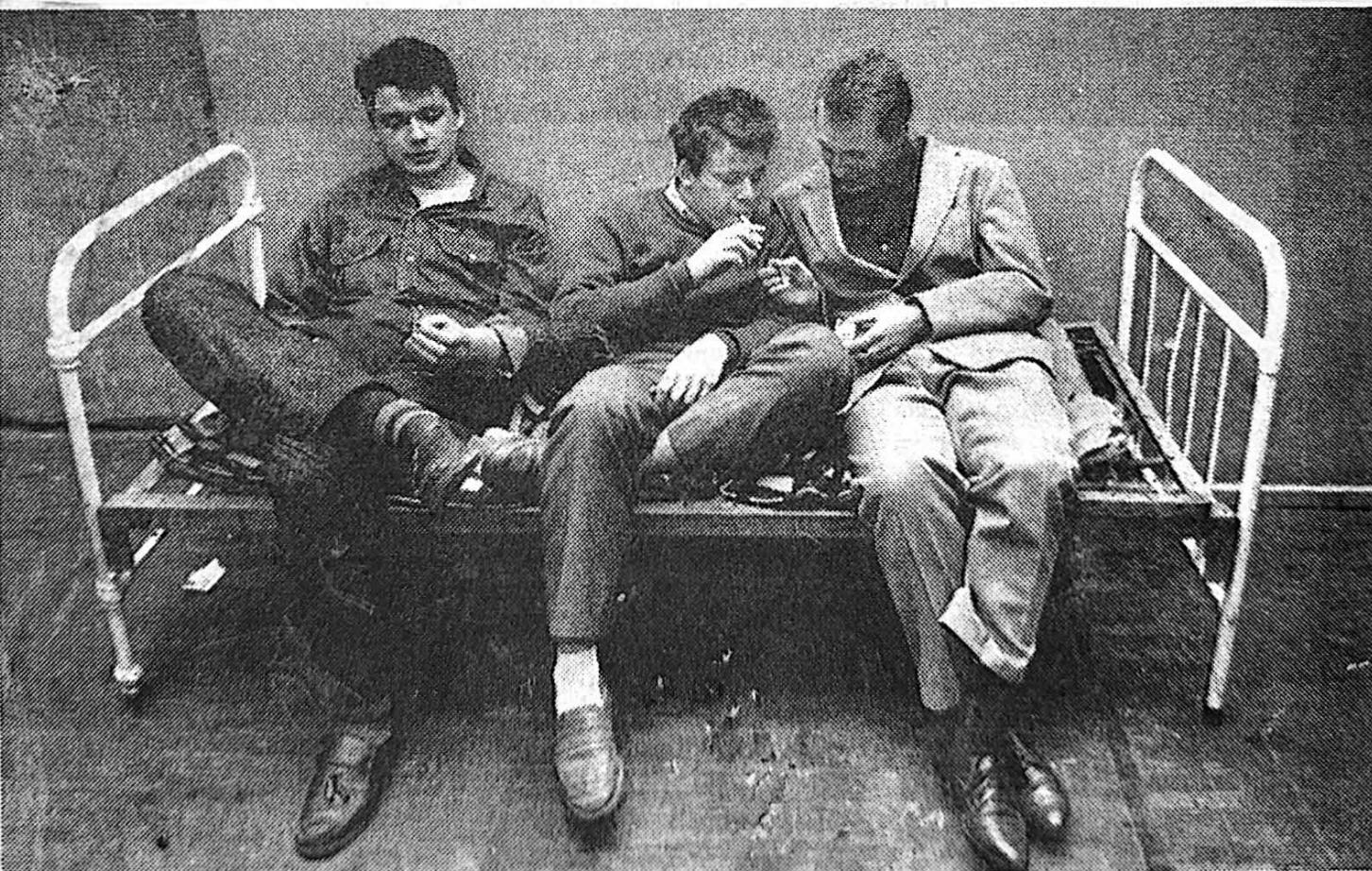
The display immediately revived week-old rumors that a real rather than symbolic confrontation was in the offing — the seizure of television or newspaper offices, or of the new government's headquarters.

Late tonight, troops again moved through the streets of the capital, but only as escort for a Soviet officer who visited the Lithuanian government to explain the high school seizure.

After a few hours of scurrying and meetings, President Vytautis Landsbergis attributed the flareup to local militants of the rump Communist Party. He said he doubted that the Soviet President, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, was behind these intrigues, saying a "catastrophe" could occur should such incidents get out of hand.

Again independent Lithuania's midnight unease set in, worrying over when, if ever, Moscow might move beyond cat-and-mouse stratagems.

## A 'War of Nerves'



Associated Press

Nearly 3,000 soldiers are estimated to have deserted from the ranks of about 38,000 Lithuanians serving in the Soviet armed forces. Some of the deserters found safety in the psychiatric hospital in Vilnius.



Agence France-Presse

Lithuania has taken the fast, bold course for independence, with uncertain results. In a photo released by the Soviet news agency Novosti, Soviet soldiers view confiscated weapons that were seized yesterday from a Lithuanian association preparing conscripts for military service.

Over at the Lithuanian Parliament, a building with the functional stone and glass look of a county government in suburban America, representatives from Lithuania's allies in Baltic separatism, Latvia and Estonia, showed up to offer sympathy.

Sitting together as members of the Baltic Council, they accused Soviet officials of waging a "war of nerves" in all the emergency announcements from Moscow and in the now-famous midnight ramble of 59 Soviet tanks past the Parliament to an army post in the north of the city.

As much as offering solidarity, the visitors were entitled to be gathering intelligence for their own agendas of trying to decide just how fast and how hard to push Moscow for independence.

Lithuania has taken the faster, bolder course, with clearly uncertain results, and now is left waiting to hear something more concrete from Moscow than tank backfire.

### An Ethnic Pole Worries

Out amid the dark plowed fields around Kena, 15 miles southeast of Vilnius, the slaying of the spring pig had taken place, and its many parts were glistening starkly in cans and pots inside the simple wood house of the local schoolteacher.

"It's not good," said the 40-year-old teacher, Teresa, who did not want her family name used. "People are losing their native language."

A member of the nation's deep-rooted Polish minority, Teresa was complaining that the learning of Lithuanian soon would be mandatory in the republic. This seemed to be the main worry about the implications of independence in the little collective farm village.

"This is about the future of our children," the schoolteacher said. "We are not prepared for this."

Further along the mud path lined with small houses, two villagers celebrated the fact that after decades of war and occupation they were too old to have to care any longer about the latest political tensions.

"The devil with them," said a 66-year-old man named Franz, grinning Bruegel-like by his garden. "It's a game. I do not pay attention."